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A Note on the Thesis of the "Invisible Government"

Towards the end of the book there are some statements with which all must agree:

1. The danger of special operations...[lies] in embarking upon them too readily and without effective presidential control." (p. 352)
2. Special operations should be launched only after the most sober deliberation by the President, acting upon the broadest possible advice...not only from the intelligence community, but from responsible officials with a wider viewpoint." (p. 353)
3. If...it becomes necessary to undertake a secret operation, it is imperative that the long-range repercussions be weighed in advance. (p. 353)
4. The intelligence and espionage technicians who have a natural affinity for such activist solutions should never be allowed to dominate the deliberations leading to secret operations. Nor should they be permitted exclusive control of the conduct of operations in the field. (p. 354)
5. Congress should also be kept informed. (p. 354)

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We could not too loudly applaud the warning of the first passage, nor the exhortations of the next four. However, it is important to note that the matters which the book sets forth as desiderata happen in fact to be and to have been from the beginning the foundation stones of clandestine operations planning. As Allen Dulles has written and many other authoritative voices have testified, CIA clandestine operations are undertaken only with the full knowledge and sanction of higher authority.

Oddly in this book of all places this higher authority is given rather precise definition. For example:

1. The Bay of Pigs

President Eisenhower authorized the secret training and arming of the Cuban rebels. (p. 25) On April 4 the President [Mr. Kennedy] met with his top advisors...He went around the table asking their opinion of the invasion plan. (p. 43) "...From the start CIA had established liaison with the State Department to keep the tight circle of officials privy to the plan informed of its progress. (p. 43)

2. Iran 1953

The British and American governments had together decided to mount an operation to overthrow Mossadegh. (p. 111)

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3. Burma

"...Sebalds superiors -- men just below John Foster Dulles -- were officially ignorant of the fact." (p. 131). This careful wording can only be read to mean that Secretary Dulles did know and that the "men just below him knew too, but not officially.

4. Guatemala

Page 171 makes clear that the top echelon of the government were privy to the operation: President Eisenhower, Assistant Secretaries of State Holland and Morton, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Ambassador Peurifoy, and, though not specifically mentioned, surely by permissible inference, the Secretaries of State and Defense.

It is noteworthy that ~~although~~ in the above instances, the very members of the National Security Council who would have a role in decisions of this sort are identified according to their office but never as members of the Council. The thought expressed on p. 5, "But in fact many of its [the Invisible Government] decisions are never discussed in the Council" is in this way given a considerable impetus. And the subsequent discussion of the Special Group (p. 5, and at greater length pp. 260-1) makes no connection between the Special Group and its parent organization, the NSC.

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Of course the thesis of the book makes this sort of blurring essential. The thesis could not possibly stand up if the authors were, for example, to be honest enough to identify President Kennedy's "top advisors in the case of Cuba, ^{and} the US government in the case of Iran as the NSC, or if in discussing the Special Group they were to make clear the relationship between its members and the members of the NSC. Even so, to the careful and knowledgeable reader -- and I fear there will not be a great number -- the authors have all but demolished their thesis on pp. 260-1. There they name McGeorge Bundy, McCone, McNamara, Gilpatric, and Alexis Johnson as the Special Group members. To the informed this list fairly shouts the extraordinary quality and high rank of the Group. If it does not "conjure up a picture of the Cabinet, the National Security Council, or some Special Presidential Commission meeting in solemn session" (p. 261). it is only because of the slick and trashy comment (see pp. 261 & 351, for example) which the authors use in purposeful derogation of the Special Group.

And so also the manner in which they cope with congressional oversight of the "Invisible Government." Here the treatment is perhaps even more disingenuous. They admit to "CIA sub-committees in the House and Senate," but they do not name them -- though this is on the public record -- they do not name their

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members; they do not name the other congressional committees before which the "Invisible Government" appears; they do not hint that the Director of Central Intelligence would be wise to be frank with Congress and is. They merely dust off the relationship with a deprecatory crack at the membership of the "shadowy" committees: "Most conservative elements in Congress, close personally and philosophically to those who run the Invisible Government...heavily weighted with legislators whose field of competence is military affairs." (p. 354)

With these observations one must conclude that the title of the book and its tortuously developed thesis was an after-thought on the authors' part. The book is a gossip book, another "inside story." But, argued someone, the gossip market is not as good as the righteous indignation market; make it a book of righteous indignation; or make it appear to be one. At the very least put up the pious facade, prop it as best you can; then run the burlesque show behind it.

This has been done.



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